



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

April 9, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers (Acts 2:42).

This Scripture passage reminds us that the Easter Season is an apt time to renew our fidelity to those essential actions that define us as the Body of Christ. Preeminent among these activities is gathering with the Church to celebrate the Most Holy Eucharist on Sundays and Holy Days.

In March of last year, because of the many unknowns that came with the Covid-19 Pandemic, and to protect the most vulnerable among us, after consultation I decided to take the unprecedented step of suspending public Masses and granting a general dispensation to the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Venice from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Together with our fellow citizens, I urged Catholics to exercise caution to protect the health of all. I thank everyone for their patience and understanding during this difficult time.

As the Faithful returned to in-person worship when restrictions were loosened, the Diocese's Clergy and Faithful performed exceptional service in maintaining safety protocols. In recent weeks as vaccines have become available, the news in Florida is encouraging, even more members of the Faithful have returned to our Parishes for Sunday Mass. Our Holy Week and Easter Liturgies were particularly edifying examples of commitment to Christ and the Eucharist. Furthermore, life in Southwest Florida has returned to some level of normalcy; restaurants, stores, and entertainment venues are open, and people of all ages seem willing to return to ordinary activities.

It is apparent that circumstances now allow almost all Catholics to attend Mass safely. Therefore, beginning **May 1, 2021**, the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation will be lifted in the Diocese of Venice.

At the same time, the Faithful should note this obligation does not apply to those who are ill, or others as outlined in the revised guidelines accompanying this letter. The revised guidelines adjust safety protocols to acknowledge that most Catholics can return to in-person worship at their Parish churches.

During this year dedicated to St. Joseph, the Faithful are encouraged to turn to his intercession for protection and courage. Let us be mindful in prayer of those who are no longer with us and those who continue in their recovery. May God bless you and your family.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
Venice in Florida

FJD/nml

DIOCESE OF VENICE
Ongoing Guidelines for Parish Life
In the Context of Covid-19

Updated: April 9, 2021

Guidelines for the Celebration of Mass

- The general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days will be lifted as of May 1, 2021.
- The following persons are not obligated to attend Mass:
 - Those who are ill, confined to their home, hospital, or nursing facility as well as those who care for them,
 - Those who have reason to believe they were recently exposed to Covid-19,
 - Those who have underlying health conditions or are in a high-risk category,
 - and those who have a reasonable fear or anxiety of becoming ill if they attend Mass.
- **It remains essential that all in attendance at Mass continue to wear a mask - this measure is vital to allowing these updated guidelines to be adopted.**
- Parishes should continue to Live-Stream Masses in the languages in which Masses are offered.
- If they have not already done so, Parishes should resume their pre-pandemic Mass schedule. It may be necessary to schedule additional Masses during this period of transition as more of the Faithful return to Mass.
- Distancing should be adapted to three feet between persons who are not from the same household. With this change, it will no longer be necessary to block every other row of pews. Parishioners may be seated in a staggered fashion, while respecting three feet of distance.
- No division should be made according to one's vaccination status.
- Deacons, Readers, Servers, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should resume their duties in the celebration of Mass, if they have not already done so. In the case of Servers, this may not necessarily include all of their prior responsibilities, but Parishes are strongly encouraged to bring Servers back.
- A cantor is permitted, and limited choirs may resume. It is envisioned that this will be smaller groups and not a full choir. Masks should be worn by choir members.
- Weekday Masses should continue in the main Church, rather than in a chapel.

- Hospitality Ministers and Ushers should not make physical contact when greeting Parishioners.
- Priests, Deacons, Readers, Servers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Ushers, and Sacristans are to continue following prescribed handwashing and sanitizing practices.
- The Offertory Procession may return, provided that all involved sanitize their hands.
- Parishes should continue to carry out the collection in the manner they have presently adopted.
- It continues to be necessary that there be no physical contact during the Sign of Peace. Recall that the Sign of Peace is an optional part of the Mass. Further, there should be no hand holding during the recitation of the Lord's Prayer.
- Communion for concelebrants should be done by intinction.
- Communion should be distributed in the traditional manner — bringing Eucharist to Parishioners in the pews should cease — with Parishioners responsible for maintaining reasonable distance during the procession. Parishes may consider designating a separate Communion station for those who wish to receive Communion on the tongue. Communion received on the tongue should be administered at the same time as those receiving in the hand and not after Mass.
- At this time, the Precious Blood should not be distributed to the Faithful.

Guidelines Related to the Church Building and Related Liturgical Objects

- Because it has been demonstrated that Covid-19 is an airborne disease, while attention to sanitizing between Masses remains important, Parishes should focus on bathrooms and other high traffic areas rather than trying to sanitize the entire Church after each Mass.
- All Communion vessels are to be thoroughly and properly cleansed after Mass with hot, soapy water after being purified according to the rubrics.
- Hand sanitizer should be available at all church entrances and in the Sanctuary where it can be easily used by Celebrants, Extraordinary Ministers and others serving at the Mass.
- Holy Water fonts (stoups) should remain emptied at this time. Baptismal fonts should remain empty when not celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism.
- Parishes may offer printed worship aids. However, these should be limited to single use and disposed after each Mass. Parishes may also choose to utilize familiar hymns or provide electronic worship aids. Paper bulletins may be distributed only as people exit the Church. Parish Bulletins could also be distributed electronically.

Sacramental and Parish Life

- Weddings and funerals should be held. It is permissible for the Bride and Groom to receive Communion under Both Species, provided they receive from a different Chalice than the Presider.
- Baptisms should also continue. Clean water must be used for each individual Baptism.
- Parishes should hold regular Confession. If confessionals have insufficient space or ventilation, another location within the Church may be used, respecting both privacy and necessary health precautions.
- Outdoor Confessions, particularly those celebrated in vehicles, should be discontinued except in individual cases. As a reminder, the Penitents cannot confess their sins via means of electronic communication.
- Anointing of the Sick should be done with the utmost care upon request.
- Visits to the homebound for Communion should resume with appropriate caution. Further, Parishes should seek to visit sick Parishioners in hospitals and nursing homes.
- Parishes are encouraged to continue to offer Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Churches should also be open for visitation at other times (remembering that contagion from surfaces does not pose the significant threat as was originally thought).
- Parish group activities may resume. This includes, but is not limited to: Bible Studies, Bereavement Ministry, CCW, Youth Group, Knights of Columbus, and Rosary Groups. Masks must be worn, and distancing observed at group activities.
- Volunteers are encouraged to resume serving in Parishes.
- All Parish offices should be open, following guidelines for masks and distancing. The office hours are to be 8-4 or 9-5, Monday-Friday.